

T H E

L O U N G E R.

[N^o LXXXVII.]

Saturday, Sept. 30. 1786.

————— *Sed in longum tamen ævum*
Manferunt bodieque manent vestigia ruris.

HOR.

THAT there is Nobody in town, is the observation of every person one has met for several weeks past; and though the word *Nobody*, like its fellow-vocable *Everybody*, has a great latitude of signification, and in this instance means upwards of three-score thousand people, yet undoubtedly in a certain rank of life, one finds, at this season, a very great blank in one's accustomed society. He whom circumstances oblige to remain in town, feels a sort of imprisonment, from which his more fortunate acquaintance have escaped to purer air, to fresher breezes, and a clearer sky. He sees, with a very melancholy aspect, the close window-shutters of deserted houses, the rusted knockers, and mossy pavement of unfrequented squares, and the few distant scattered figures of empty walks; while he fancies, in the country, the joyousness of the reapers, and the shout of the sportsman enlivening the fields; and within doors, the hours made jocund by the festivity of assembled friends, the frolic, the dance, and the song.

Though the prevailing incidents of my later part of life have fixed it almost constantly to a town, yet no body is more enthusiastically fond of the country than I; and amidst all my banishment from it, I have contrived still to preserve a relish for its pleasures, and an enjoyment of its sports, which few who visit it so seldom are able to retain. I can still weave an angling-line, or dress a fly, am at least a hit-and-miss man a-shooting, and have not forgotten the tune of a *View-Holla*, or the encouraging *Hark forward!* to a cautious hound. But though these are a set of capacities which mark one's denizenship to the country, and which therefore I am proud to retain, yet I confess I am more delighted with its quieter and less turbulent pleasures. There is a sort of moral use of the country which every man who has not lost the rural sentiment will feel; a certain purity of mind and imagination which its scenes inspire, a simplicity, a colouring of nature on the objects around us, which correct the artifice and interestedness of the world. There is in the country a pensive vacancy (if the expression may be allowed me) of mind, which stills the violence of passion, and the tumult of desire. One can hardly dream on the bank of some nameless brook, without waking a better and a wiser man. I early took the liberty of boasting to my readers, that, as a *Lounger*, I had learned to be idle without guilt,

and indolent without indifference. In the country, methinks, I find this disposition congenial to the place; the air which breathes around me, like that which touches the *Eolian harp*, steals on my soul a tender but varied tone of feeling, that lulls while it elevates, that soothes while it inspires. Not a blade that whistles in the breeze, not a weed that spreads its speckled leaves to the sun, but may add something to the ideas of him who can lounge with all his mind open about him.

I am not sure if, in the regret which I feel for my absence from the country, I do not rate its enjoyments higher, and paint its landscapes in more glowing colours, than the reality might afford. I have long cultivated a talent very fortunate for a man of my disposition, that of travelling in my easy-chair, of transporting myself, without stirring from my parlour, to distant places and to absent friends, of drawing scenes in my mind's eye, and of peopling them with the groups of fancy, or the society of remembrance. When I have sometimes lately felt the dreariness of the town, deserted by my acquaintance; when I have returned from the coffeehouse where the boxes were unoccupied, and strolled out from my accustomed walk, which even the lame beggar had left; I was fain to shut myself up in my room, order a dish of my best tea, (for there is a sort of melancholy which disposes one to make much of one's self), and calling up the powers of memory and imagination, leave the solitary town for a solitude more interesting, which my younger days enjoyed in the country, which I think, and if I am wrong I do not wish to be undeceived, was the most elysian spot in the world.

'Twas at an old Lady's, a relation and godmother of mine, where a particular incident occasioned my being left during the vacation of two successive seasons. Her house was formed out of the remains of an old Gothic castle, of which one tower was still almost entire; it was tenanted by kindly daws and swallows. Beneath, in a modernized part of the building, resided the mistress of the mansion. The house was skirted with a few majestic elms and beeches, and the stumps of several others shewed that they had once been more numerous. To the west a clump of firs covered a rugged rocky dell, where the rooks claimed a prescriptive seignory. Through this a dashing rivulet forced its way, which afterwards grew quiet in its progress; and, gurgling gently through a piece of downy meadow-ground, crossed the bottom of the garden, where a little rustic paling inclosed a washing-green, and a wicker-seat fronting the south was placed for the accommodation of the old Lady, whose lesser tour, when her fields did not require a visit, used to terminate in this spot. Here, too, were ranged the hives for her bees, whose hum, in a still, warm sunshine, soothed the good old Lady's indolence, while their proverbial industry was sometimes quoted for the instruction of her washers. The brook ran brawling through some underwood on the outside of the garden, and soon after formed a little cascade, which fell into the river that winded through a valley in front of the house. When hay-making or harvest was going on, my godmother took her long stick in her hand, and over-
looked

looked the labours of the mowers or reapers; though I believe there was little thrift in the superintendency, as the visit generally cost her a draught of beer or a dram, to encourage their diligence.

Within doors she had so able an assistant, that her labour was little. In that department an old man-servant was her minister, the father of my *Peter*, who serves me not the less faithfully that we have gathered nuts together in my godmother's hazel bank. This old butler (I call him by his title of honour, though in truth he had many subordinate offices) had originally enlisted with her husband, who went into the army a youth, though he afterwards married and became a country gentleman, had been his servant abroad, and attended him during his last illness at home. His best hat, which he wore a-Sundays, with a scarlet waistcoat of his master's, had still a cockade in it.

Her husband's books were in a room at the top of a screw staircase, which had scarce been opened since his death; but her own library for Sabbath or rainy days, was ranged in a little book-press in the parlour. It consisted, as far as I can remember, of several volumes of sermons, a Concordance, *Thomas à Kempis*, Antoninus's Meditations, the Works of the Author of the *Whole Duty of Man*, and a translation of *Boethius*; the original editions of the *Spectator* and *Guardian*, *Cowley's Poems*, *Dryden's Works*, (of which I had lost a volume soon after I first came about her house), *Baker's Chronicle*, *Burnet's History* of his own Times, *Lamb's Royal Cookery*, *Abercromby's Scots Warriors*, and *Nisbet's Heraldry*.

The subject of the last-mentioned book was my godmother's strong ground; and she could disentangle a point of genealogy beyond any body I ever knew. She had an excellent memory for anecdote; and her stories, though sometimes long, were never tiresome; for she had been a woman of great beauty and accomplishment in her youth, and had kept such company as made the drama of her stories respectable and interesting. She spoke frequently of such of her own family as she remembered when a child, but scarcely ever of those she had lost, though one could see she thought of them often. She had buried a beloved husband and four children. Her youngest, Edward, "her beautiful," "her brave," fell in Flanders, and was not entombed with his ancestors. His picture, done when a child, an artless red and white portrait, smelling at a nosegay, but very like withal, hung at her bedside, and his sword and gorget were crossed under it. When she spoke of a soldier, it was in a style above her usual simplicity; there was a sort of swell in her language, which sometimes a tear (for her age had not lost the privilege of tears) made still more eloquent. She kept her sorrows, like the devotions that soled her, sacred to herself. They threw nothing of gloom over her deportment; a gentle shade only, like the flecked clouds of summer, that increase, not diminish the benignity of the season.

She had few neighbours, and still fewer visitors; but her reception of such as did visit her, was cordial in the extreme. She pressed

pressed a little too much perhaps; but there was so much heart and good-will in her importunity, as made her good things seem better than those of any other table. Nor was her attention confined only to the good fare of her guests, though it might have flattered her vanity more than that of most exhibitors of good dinners, because the cookery was generally directed by herself. Their servants lived as well in her hall, and their horses in her stable. She looked after the airing of their sheets, and saw their fires mended if the night was cold. Her old butler, who rose sometimes, would never suffer any body to mount his horse fasting.

The parson of the parish was her guest every Sunday, and said prayers in the evening. To say truth, he was no great genius, nor much a scholar. I believe my godmother knew rather more of divinity than he did; but she received from him information of another sort; he told her who were the poor, the sick, the dying of the parish, and she had some assistance, some comfort for them all.

I could draw the old lady at this moment!—dressed in grey, with a clean white hood nicely plaited, (for she was somewhat finical about the neatness of her person), sitting in her straight-backed elbow-chair, which stood in a large window scooped out of the thickness of the ancient wall. The middle panes of the window were of painted glass, the story of Joseph and his brethren. On the outside waved a honeysuckle tree, which often threw its shade across her book, or her work; but she would not allow it to be cut down. “It has stood there many a day,” said she, “and we old inhabitants should bear with one another.” Methinks I see her thus seated, her spectacles on, but raised a little on her brow for a pause of explanation, their shagreen-case laid between the leaves of a silver-clasped family-Bible—On one side, her bell and snuff-box, on the other her knitting apparatus in a blue damask bag.—Between her and the fire an old Spanish pointer, that had formerly been her son Edward’s, teased, but not teased out of his gravity, by a little terrier of mine.—All this is before me, and I am a hundred miles from town, its inhabitants, and its business. In town I may have seen such a figure; but the country scenery around, like the tasteful frame of an excellent picture, gives it a heightening, a relief, which it would lose in any other situation.

Some of my readers, perhaps, will look with little relish on the portrait. I know it is an egotism in me to talk of its value; but over this dish of tea, and in such a temper of mind, one is given to egotism. It will be only adding another to say, that when I recall the rural scene of the good old Lady’s abode, her simple, her innocent, her useful employments, the afflictions she sustained in this world, the comforts she drew from another; I feel a serenity of soul, a benignity of affections, which I am sure confer happiness, and I think must promote virtue.

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